

GREAT
LAKES
THEATER

TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE



F^ore^over PLAID

Written and originally directed & choreographed by STUART ROSS

Music continuity supervision & arrangements by JAMES RAITT

Originally produced by GENE WOLSK

Directed by VICTORIA BUSSERT

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Cleveland's Classic Company
at Playhouse Square

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Spring 2017

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production *Forever Plaid* by Stuard Ross, which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from May 5—21, 2017.

On one stormy night in the 1960s, four eager singers known as The Plaids met their untimely ends in a cherry red, 1954 Mercury on the way to their first big gig. In 2017, this quartet of comic crooners gets one last chance to return from the afterlife to do the show they never got to perform. The Plaids deliver delightfully with playful patter and angelic voices in an unforgettable show that will have audiences rolling in the aisles when they're not humming along to the great nostalgic pop hits of the 1950s.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Forever Plaid*. We offer special thanks to Madelon Horvath for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaffer Florian
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The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its mainstage productions and its educational programming, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER



You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or television.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that most visual art forms cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc.,

be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE



Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre.

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in PlayhouseSquare, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the Company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The Company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square its home. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

BY STUART ROSS

When most of us think of the 1950s, we think of rock 'n' roll, greasers, hot rods, Elvis, Annette, Fabian, D.A., haircuts and teenage rebellion. But there was a flip side to this era — the side of harmony, innocence and the sincerity of dreams. It is the side that's been lost in the shuffle of progress. It was a time when most parents and kids listened and danced to the same music; when families partook of the ritual of gathering in front of the TV to watch their favorite variety shows, like *The Ed Sullivan Show* or *The Perry Como Show*. It was a time when every family worked to fulfill the American Dream.

It was a period when four-part guy groups harmonized their way across the airwaves, jukeboxes and hi-fis of the country. Throughout the land they would stand at a quartet of microphones, crooning a multitude of chaperoned prom-goers into dreamy romance.

They wore dinner jackets and bow ties (or perhaps cardigans and white bucks). Each move was drilled to precision. Each vocal arrangement soared to stratospheric heights of harmony. This sound crested right before rock 'n' roll stole the heartbeat of music across the globe.

During this time, guys across the county banded together to sing in the basement for fun. If things worked out they might be hired to sing at weddings, conventions, proms and county clubs socials. Inspired by the success of the recording stars, they made plans to zoom into careers of fame and fortune. But the musical taste of the U.S.A. was changing, and the country would not stop to listen to their dreams.

SPOTLIGHT ON *FOREVER PLAID*

A BRIEF HISTORY

Stuart Ross, book writer and creator of *Forever Plaid*, was just a boy of five in 1956 when his older brother went off to college and left him a collection of vinyl 45s. It included The Four Freshman, The Four Aces and The Four Lads. His parents also owned ... wait for it ... a diner! Who better to write a 1950s jukebox musical about a foursome of aspiring clean-cut, close-harmony singing, plaid-wearing young men?

Ross has written us the story of Frankie, Smudge, Sparky and Jinx, a quartet returning from the afterlife (they had been killed in a collision with a bus full of Catholic girls) to play their dream gig. With 28 songs, including "Three Coins in the Fountain," "Lady of Spain" and "Shangri-La," we're transported to a time where four-part boy bands harmonized their way from gig to gig. The tightly arranged vocals are lush, romantic and swoon-worthy. It's a style that personified romance and innocence, a style that both parents and kids listened to together in the 1950s.

It's important to remember that *Forever Plaid* is not a spoof or parody. It is truly earnest and sincere. It just happens to be funny along the way. There's an innocence and a charm in the notion that four high school chums might rehearse in the family basement, might talk of young love and squabble about dance moves and harmony parts. The true joy of a jukebox musical is that you could strip the set and lights, and enjoy a concert of 28 nostalgic tunes that transport you to a bygone era of music. *Forever Plaid* is no exception.

— Dave Pepin,

CHARACTERS:

Francis: The leader and caretaker of the group, Francis has the most confidence. He takes care of his fellow Plaids and makes sure everyone knows where they're supposed to be and what is supposed to happen next. He is also the connection between the audience and the guys. He has asthma, which acts up whenever numbers are too fast or the choreography gets too energetic. He has a great deal of compassion for the music and the group.

Sparky: The “cut-up” of the group, Sparky is always looking for ways to crack jokes. He is very sharp and loves singing his tailor-made solos. He wears a retainer and has a slight speech impediment or lisp. Even though he is energetic and clever, he cares for his stepbrother, Jinx. He sings with a joyous bravura and loves to perform. He loves to tell stories and relishes every word. He is the comic engine of the show.

Jinx: The shy one, Jinx is usually terrified. He doesn't always remember what songs come next or what the next move is. He is Sparky's stepbrother and there is a little sibling rivalry going on between them. He occasionally gets a nose bleed when he sings above an A. He lives his life terrified. He was abused and beaten. He is only in the group because he sings the high notes beautifully. The others are very protective of him.

Smudge: The worrier, Smudge worries about the props and the running order and always assumes that the audience won't like him. He has a chronic nervous stomach and is very reluctant to perform. He is also very clumsy. Smudge never enjoys or appreciates what he has. He always worries about what is coming up and regrets what is past.

This is the story of such a group — FOREVER PLAID.

Synopsis:

Once upon a time, there were four guys (Sparky, Smudge, Jinx and Frankie) who loved to sing. They all met in high school when they joined the audiovisual club (1956). Discovering they shared an affection for music and entertaining, they got together and dreamed of becoming like their idols—the Four Aces, the Four Lads, the Four Freshmen, the Hi-los and the Crew Cuts. They rehearsed in the basement of Smudge's family's plumbing supply company. It was here they became Forever Plaid—a name that connects traditional values of family, home and harmony. Although rock 'n' roll was racing down the fast lane like a candy apple “vette,” they believed in their music. As their sound developed, they sang at family gatherings, fund-raisers, and eventually graduated to supermarket openings and proms. They had little time for romance or leisure, for they supported their fantasy by holding down day jobs—Frankie was in dental supplies, Smudge was in bathroom fixtures, Sparky was in better dresses. They devoted themselves to singing at nights and on weekends. Then, finally, they landed their first big gig at the Airport Hilton cocktail bar—the Fusel Lounge.

Then it happened. On February 9, 1964, en route to pick up their custom-made plaid tuxedos, they were driving in their cherry-red 1954 Mercury convertible and rehearsing their big finale when they were slammed broadside by a school bus filled with eager Catholic teens. The teens were on their way to witness the Beatles make their U.S. television debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and miraculously escaped injury. The members of Forever Plaid were killed instantly. It is at that moment, when their careers and lives ended, that the story of *Forever Plaid* begins.

Through the power of Harmony and the Expanding Holes in the Ozone Layer, in conjunction with the positions of the planets and all the other astro-technical stuff, they are allowed to come back to perform the show they never got to do in life.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

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SHANGRI-LA by Carl Sigman, Matt Malneck and Robert Maxwell. Used by permission of EMI Robbins Catalog Inc.

SHE LOVES YOU by John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Used by permission of Gil Music Corp.

Cast of Characters

Francis.....	Mack Shirilla *
Sparky.....	Andrew Kotzen *
Jinx.....	Mickey Patrick Ryan *
Smudge.....	James Penca *
Musicians.....	Matthew Webb (Conductor), Timothy Powell

* Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

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Dedication: *Forever Plaid* is dedicated to the “good guys;” to the guys who wheeled the projector carts, for the AV club; to the guys who saved their allowance to give their parents a special night on the town for their anniversary; to the guys who carried an extra handkerchief; to the guys who never went beyond first base, and if they did, they didn’t tell anyone. We Salute You!

LAKE TAHOE SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL'S PRODUCTION OF
FOREVER PLAID, NOW PLAYING AT GLT'S HANNA THEATRE





Andrew Kotzen, James Penca, Mickey Ryan & Mack Shirilla. Photo Credit: Joy Strotz, Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival.

SCENIC DESIGN

BY JEFF HERRMANN



Left: photo of the set model.



IF YOU HAVE ONE DAY TO PREPARE

The most important thing for students to be aware of for this production is a sense of the culture of the early 60's. America was very idealistic. Dads worked all day, and Moms were at home. Kids left in the morning to hang out with friends and were told to be home by dinner-time. Teens drove “muscle cars” and showed them off at the local “drive-in” where they ordered Cokes, burgers and fries – and nobody worried about cholesterol! There were three TV channels and everybody listened to Top 40 Music and watched the same TV shows. One of the most popular was the Ed Sullivan Show – aired on Sunday nights on CBS.

As students come in the room, play some recordings from a 50's quartet such as the Four Aces or Marcells (*Blue Moon*, *Sincerely*, or *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* – on YouTube).

If you can, play some YouTube Videos of the *Ed Sullivan Show* for the students. This will give them the background they need to have more fun with the show – and get more of the jokes. The information below will help you give them the background they will need to get full enjoyment from the show.

The Ed Sullivan Show

For near a quarter century, one of the most powerful figures in popular entertainment was Ed Sullivan. A former syndicated sports and entertainment columnist Sullivan was hardly the most charismatic television host in history, but his humble demeanor was endearing to American audiences, and from 1948 – 1971 he brought the most important performers of the mid-twentieth century to CBS for a Sunday night variety show designed to appeal to the entire family.

On any given evening, audiences might expect to see stand-up comedians, opera singers, performances from plays currently running on Broadway – the includes not only numbers from musicals, but also scenes from straight (non-musical) productions – puppet acts, circus acts, dance, and (eventually) rock and roll. As recently as 2002, The Ed Sullivan Show was ranked fifteenth in *TV Guide's Greatest TV Shows of All Time*.



Ed Sullivan

Performers whose names might still be recognized by today's audiences include Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Diana Ross and the Supremes, early, pre-*Sesame Street* appearances by Jim Henson's “Muppets” and in 1958 the appearance of a thirteen year-old violinist named Itzhak Perlman.

Elvis Presley

In spite of concerns that the Mississippi-born rockabilly's physicality might be inappropriate for a family audience, the ratings Presley was receiving on other variety programs made it a financial necessity for Sullivan to book his act. His first appearance on the show in 1956 attracted a record 60 million viewers or

82.6% of the available television audience.

Concerns about lascivious hip-shaking were largely unfounded, though the *New York Times* called the performance “distasteful.” This did not prevent Sullivan from booking Presley for two more appearances during the year that followed.

The Beatles

The Beatles already had a number one single in America with *I Want to Hold Your Hand* when they appeared on the Sullivan program in February, 1964. Their appearance, which broke another television record for Ed Sullivan with 73 million viewers, was the first time most Americans had seen the British quartet, making them an instant phenomenon.

Arriving only a few months after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Beatles charm and cheer on *The Ed Sullivan Show* has often been widely credited with beginning closure for a period of national mourning.

Señor Wences

The popular Spanish ventriloquist Wenceslao Moreno or *Señor Wences* appeared on the program 23 times. His taste for absurd puppets included Pedro, who was a head in a box, and Johnny, who was a crudely drawn face on Wences’s own hand. He was also a talented plate-spinner and juggler, who heckled himself through his puppet characters’ voices. *Plate spinning is, in fact, the art of balancing and spinning a plate on the top of a stick.*

Topo Gigio

In the early 1960s, Topo Gigio appeared with Sullivan as a sidekick. A ten-inch high anthropomorphic mouse puppet with an Italian accent, Topo was controlled by four puppeteers and engaged in conversation with the host or singing songs, sometimes accompanied by other puppet characters created by Maria Peregó. Topo was given the honor of closing the final *Ed Sullivan Show* broadcast in 1971.

The Singing Nun

Jeanne Deckers was a Belgian guitarist and singer who performed under the name Soeur Sourire (meaning “Sister Smile”) though English speaking audiences called her *The Singing Nun*. She was an actual nun, taking the name Sister Luc-Gabrielle, and with her guitar (which she named “Sister Adele”) became a sensation in America when she performed her French-language hit “Dominique” on Sullivan’s program in 1964.



Elvis Presley on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.



Señor Wences and Johnny.



Sullivan with Topo Gigio.



Sister Luc-Gabrielle.

VOCALISTS OF THE 50S AND 60S

INSPIRATION FOR THE PLAIDS



The Four Aces

Hit Songs:

Love is a Many-Splendored Thing

Three Coins in the Fountain

Stranger in Paradise

Tell Me Why

Perfidia

Sincerely



The Four Lads

Hit Songs:

Moments to Remember

No, Not Much

Standin' on the Corner



The Crew Cuts

Hit Songs:

Crazy 'Bout You Baby

Earth Angel

Sh-boom



The Marcells

Hit Song:

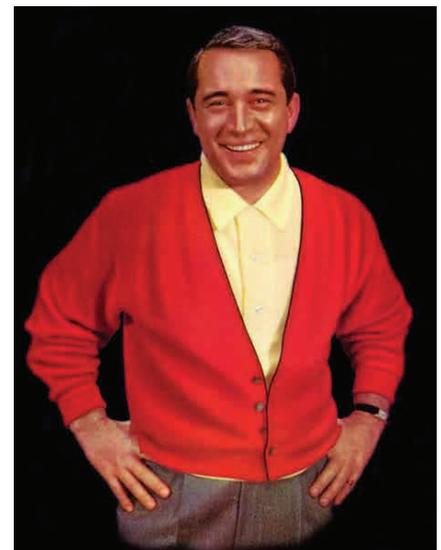
Blue Moon

Perry Como

Perry Como was a singing, American television icon, hosting numerous Christmas specials, and the long-running *Kraft Music Hall* variety show on NBC. Como was a big band vocalist, and contributed extensively to the “easy listening”

genre of light, inoffensive crooning.

Though he often appeared on television in a suit or tuxedo, his trademark look is cardigan sweater. He had fourteen number one hits, including *Some Enchanted Evening*, *Don't Let the Stars Get In Your Eyes*, and *Round and Round*.



Sources:

EdSullivan.com

TVGuide.com

EW.com

Wikipedia

Los Angeles Times

Altschuler, Glenn C. (2003) *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*

ACTIVITIES & WRITING PROMPTS

1. Most people think of the 60's as a time of political upheaval and hippies. This is true, but when you lived through it, it felt very different. Until the late 60's girl students wore dresses or skirts to school and boys wore dress pants (khaki type) and collared buttoned shirts. The draft was in force and people felt it their duty to serve their country – as their fathers had done in WWII. Women had basically three things they could be: a mother and wife, a nurse, or a teacher, and it was said that many went to college to get a “Mrs.” Degree. This is the time period of *Forever Plaid* – a time of relative innocence ... if you were white and middle-class. It can be a pleasant escape to go back there for awhile. This is the beauty of this show.
2. Students will enjoy researching this time period – things changed very rapidly as the struggles for civil rights, the Women's Movement, and the Vietnam War became part of the cultural landscape. This seemingly rapid turn of events was very challenging – people didn't know how to deal with it.

Time needed: 2-4 class periods for students to work together
Time out of class for individual research
Presentation time

Using groups of 4-5 students, have each individual take an aspect of their chosen topic and find information online using Pinterest, Google, and other easy to find sources. If anyone has access to *Life* Magazine from the time period, this could also be a great source. In class, bring the information together and discuss how the different bits of information fit together. As a group, create an overall controlling thesis/main idea for their report that will help them determine which information to keep and which won't fit. Create a Power Point or poster presentation on the topic and present to the class.

Topics to consider:

Rules, curricula, and dress codes for schools from 1955-1965.

President Kennedy assassination in 1963.

Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations.

50's era pop music – its sound and its stars.

The Elvis Presley phenomenon.

The “British Invasion” – how it changed American rock music.

The Cold War – how it affected every day Americans in the early 60's.

The Viet Nam war and changes brought about by that conflict. How was it different from World War II?

Ed Sullivan and other 60's variety shows.

Fashion changes from early to late 60's

Tech changes in the 60's – from slide rules to calculators, manual to electric typewriters, the beginning of color TV.

3. Critics say that the death of the Forever Plaid boy band in the auto wreck is symbolic of what happened to that style of music when the Beatles and their new style of music hit American teens. Research this topic and discuss the phenomenon of the “British Invasion.”

-
4. Interview someone who lived through this time period and write a short memoir of one of his/her special memories.
 5. Interview 3-4 people who lived through this time period (they will be 65 – 75 years old) and compare their experiences. How did this time period shape their ideas about music, politics, or culture? Construct your questions carefully so that you give the people lots of room for explanation and detail. This is what will make your interview fascinating. This assignment could also be a video/documentary.

What were they doing during the '60's?

How old were they?

Where were they?

What would you like to know about their experiences?

How did their point of view color their telling of the event?

What music do they most remember? (is this affected by their age?)

What major event do they most remember?

6. Find 1 or 2 examples of events that shaped the time period and clearly explain them and their significance to someone who knows nothing about them – perhaps a 6th grader. This assignment could also be a video/documentary.

Possible events:

Civil rights demonstrations

Kennedy or Martin Luther King assassinations

Viet Nam War (identify multiple points of view)

College "riots"

Woodstock

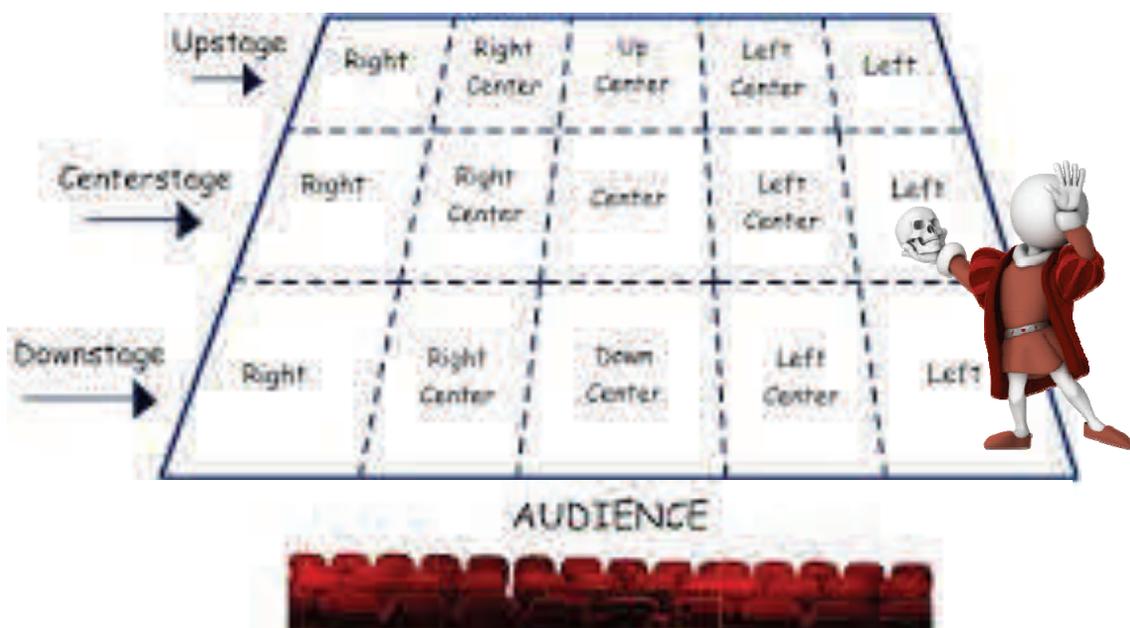
7. Find images from the culture of the early and then the later 60's. How are they different? Similar? How do you account for this?

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

Apron	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
Auditorium or House	Where the audience sits
Beam Spread	The area a single light covers
Blackout	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
Board	The control center for lights, sound, or both
Book (The)	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
Box Office	Where the audience buys tickets
Box Set	A set in a proscenium with three walls
Call	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
Cheat	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
Cloth	Scenery painted on fabric
Cue	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
Curtain Call	The bows at the end of the show
Dimmer	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
Director	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
Flat	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
Floodlight	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
Fly	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
Follow-spot	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
Footlights	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
Gel	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
Greenroom	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
Notes	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
Pit	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
Producer	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).

Properties or Props	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc)
Proscenium	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).
Raked Stage	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
Set	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
Set Dressing	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
Spotlight	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
Strike	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
Thrust	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
Tracks	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
Trap	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
Understudy	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
Upstage	The rear of the stage
Wings	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

STAGE DIRECTIONS



HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

— *David Hansen, Education Outreach Associate*

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

"Gambit": More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What were your favorite aspects of this production? How did the visual elements — the set, costume and lighting design — aid in the telling of this story? What actor do you believe had the most fully realized characterization? What was it about his performance that drew you in? What moment was the most memorable? Why?
2. Track each character's transformation from the beginning to the end of the play. What discoveries are made by the characters? Which character, if any, do you think grows the most? Why? How is that growth manifested in performance? What moment in Great Lakes' current production affected you most? Why?
3. What character did you most identify with? What was it about their journey or the actor's portrayal that left an imprint or somehow stayed with you?
4. A big idea in America around the 50's and the 60's was the eternal pursuit of the "American Dream". What do you think the "American Dream" was to people of this time period? How do we define the "American Dream" today?
5. What are your personal dreams? Why? What will you do to achieve your dreams?
6. One of the pop idols for the Plaids was Perry Como. When they met him, they were star struck. Who is your celebrity idol? What would you do if you had the chance to meet them? What would you say?
7. In *Forever Plaid*, Jinx, Frankie, Sparky and Smudge all had a dream to become the recording stars of their time. They sought fame and fortune and radiated wholesomeness and family values. Thinking about the pop stars of today, who best represents your values and who you are as a generation? Why? What qualities do they have that set them apart from other entertainers of the same genre?
8. The guys of *Forever Plaid*, sport plaid jackets as a symbol of their dreams. Plaid is often used as a symbol of family pride in certain cultures and is a way to solidify one's identity in these cultures. What symbol would you choose to display your identity or pride for who you are?
9. When you are gone from this earth, what would you like to leave as your legacy? Why?
10. If you could create a soundtrack for your life, what would be the tracks of music you would include? What meaning do these particular songs have for you and why are they important?

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ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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greatlakes theater.org